

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7079

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2498

LIMDIS

GENEVA FOR AMBASSADOR SHERER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CZ, US

SUBJECT: US-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS

1. THE GOVERNMENT HERE HAS PUT A FREEZE ON MOST ASPECTS OF US-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS. WE BELIEVE THAT THIS FLOW DIRECTLY FROM THE LONG-GRAVEL AMENDMENT.

2. THE MOST NOTICEABLE, EVEN PAINFUL, RESULT TO DATE WAS THE COLD SHOULDER GIVEN ASTRONAUT EUGENE CERNAN. HE PERFORMED BRILLIANTLY, AND WE BELIEVE THE VISIT HAD LONG-LASTING GOOD EFFECTS ANYWAY, BUT IT WAS A SHOCK TO HIM TO COME HERE TO HIS ANCESTRAL HOME, AFTER THE FINE RECEPTIONS IN RUMANIA AND YUGOSLAVIA AND ELSEWHERE, AND GET HARDLY ANY RECEPTION AT ALL. (SEE SEPTTEL.) THE LOW-LEVEL TREATMENT GIVEN CONGRESSMAN BLATNIK AND OTHERS HAS BEEN PARALLEL TO THE CERNAN TREATMENT.

3. ALL CZECHOSLOVAK OFFICIALS ARE AWARE THAT RELATIONS WITH US ARE NOW A MATTER OF GREAT SENSITIVITY. SOME OF OUR FRIENDS HAVE WHISPERED TO US THAT MOST OFFICIALS ARE NOW AFRAID OF CONTACTS WITH AMERICANS, AND ARE HOLDING THEIR BREATH FOR FEAR OF WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF CLAIMS AGREEMENT
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FALLS THROUGH.

4. CHARGE AND EMBOFF MADE ROUTINE CALL OCTOBER 3 ON NOVOTNY, ACTING HEAD OF SIXTH DEPARTMENT MFA WHILE ZANTOVSKY IS IN US, TO DISCUSS ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS. NOVOTNY BROUGHT UP AMENDMENT IMMEDIATELY AND, READING FROM NOTES, GAVE LONG AND PLAIN-TIVE LECTURE ABOUT HOW BLEAK THINGS LOOKED. HE SAID REPORTS FROM ZANTOVSKY AND OTHERS IN US WERE PESSIMISTIC, AND SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WAS KEENLY AWARE THAT FOREIGN MINISTER HAD NOT EVEN BEEN ABLE TO TALK TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE. NOVOTNY SAID CZECHS WERE UPSET AT CLAIMS FIGURE OF 109 MILLION DOLLARS BEING CITED IN US PRESS, AND SAID THIS WAS SIMPLY NOT ACCURATE. HE SAID IF PARTIAL NATURE OF CLAIMS PAYMENT WERE DISCUSSED, IT SHOULD IN FAIRNESS BE POINTED OUT THAT 18.4 TONS OF GOLD IN ONLY 55 PERCENT OF WHAT NAZIS LOOTED FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA. NOVOTNY SAID WITH SOME EMPHASIS THAT IF AMENDMENT PASSED AND CLAIMS AGREEMENT FELL, ALL HOPES FOR BETTER US-CZECHOSLOVAK RELATIONS WOULD FALL TOO. EMBOFFS HAD IMPRESSION NOVOTNY WAS NOT JUST REPEATING A LINE. CHARGE MADE POINT TO NOVOTNY THAT WE WERE FULLY AWARE OF WHAT HAD BEEN DONE, OR RATHER NOT DONE, FOR CERNAN. HE SHOWED SOME EMBARRASSMENT.

4. NOVOTNY SAID MFA WAS TRYING TO HOLD LINE AGAINST ANY COMMENTARY IN PRESS, BUT WAS HAVING INCREASING DIFFICULTY. HE SAID THEY COULD MAKE NO COMMITMENT AS TO HOW LONG THIS WOULD HOLD. HE LEFT NO DOUBT THAT SOME PEOPLE IN THE PARTY WERE READY TO OPEN UP ON THIS MATTER. HE ALSO SAID THAT DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER RUZEK MIGHT BE CALLING IN CHARGE SOON TO TALK ABOUT THE SITUATION. (ALTHOUGH THIS APPOINTMENT MIGHT NOT EVENTUATE, INFORMATION ON CURRENT STATUS WOULD BE HELPFUL IN CASE IT DOES.)

5. IN SUM, AS DEPARTMENT IS NO DOUBT AWARE WITHOUT OUR TELLING IT, WE ARE GOING THROUGH AN UNCOMFORTABLE TIME HERE IN PRAGUE. WHAT MAKES IT ESPECIALLY BAD IS THE THE FRIENDS OF AMERICA

HERE ARE THE ONES WHO ARE MOST NERVOUS ABOUT THE BAD THINGS THAT ARESRPT TO HAPPEN IF THE CLAIMS AGREEMENT FALLS THROUGH ONCE MORE.

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